

# The Travelling Sister

BY MARY E. WILKINS FREEMAN

THE Allerton sisters lived in a grand but very lonely old mansion on the side of Allerton Mountain. Allertonville, a white-steeped little village, lay in the valley below. Everything pertained to the Allertons as if they had belonged to a feudal family, and as if their old mansion-house had been a castle. Indeed, the name of Allerton had been a great one in all the countryside. They had been "college-learned," as the village people expressed it, and they had had great possessions. Now, however, the possessions had dwindled sadly. The males of the family were all gone; women had preponderated during the last two generations, and women like those of the Allerton stock are not financiers. For that matter the males had not distinguished themselves in increasing their assets; neither had they been good economists. Most of their riches had come through inheritance. The family had been wealthy collaterally, as well as in the direct line. Streams of gold and silver had poured in from all sides as one Allerton after another had passed away and left earthly riches behind. But now the springs of wealth had all run dry. There was no more coming, and that in hand was slowly but steadily diminishing.

The Allerton ladies pinned their faith upon their lawyer, John H. Fields. He and his father before him had had charge of the Allerton fortunes. The Allertons esteemed him as most reliable, and in a sense he was. Nobody could question his honesty; but how much could a little average-brained man who had been born in Allertonville and lived there to old age know of the maelstrom of Wall Street and the strange catastrophes, seemingly far removed from all possible connection with three elderly ladies and their fortune, but which nevertheless had a dire influence upon them? To his dying day John H. Fields would never understand why when a certain speculative stock de-

clined, in which he had not invested and of which he had scarcely heard, an investment of bonds which he had always considered most conservative passed dividends. Mr. Fields dreaded telling the Allerton ladies.

However, on the day following the notice in the New York paper he drove slowly up Allerton Mountain. His tall gray horse took his own gait, nodding at every step. John held the lines loosely and leaned back in his buggy. He was unmarried, and there was always a certain male coquettishness about him when he called upon the Allerton sisters, although he had no dreams whatever concerning them. John H. Fields had never thought seriously of marrying anybody. He was born to his own rut, with a scared, rabbitlike imagination for all outside. Still, he was at times involuntarily coquettish. This afternoon he wore a nice little gray alpaca coat which exactly matched his gray trousers. His linen shone. He wore the neatest of little black satin ties, glossy little shoes, a gleaming white hat, and, like the precious high light of it all, a perfect white rosebud was tucked in his buttonhole. His narrow, clean-cut face was clean shaven, and the hair at the sides of his head was like a shade of silver. He usually had an expression of blank peering serenity, as meaningless as the light upon the bowl of a silver spoon, but now his forehead was contracted and his eyes were speculative.

It was the second week of an unusually hot June. There had been no rain.

The wayside weeds hung like limp rags, all powdered with dust. Dust came up in little smokelike puffs from under his horse's hoofs. Fields glanced complacently at his gray attire, which would not show dust, then he thought of the passed dividends, of those railroad bonds, and frowned again. He knew to a dollar the extent of his clients' income—that is, with one exception,—and he

feared lest this decrease might interfere with their summer programme. He passed slowly up the mountain. The road wound; still it was steep in places. Great patches of dark wet appeared upon the sides of the horse. Fields drew out a clean handkerchief and, without disturbing the folds, carefully wiped his face, which was slightly flushed. That was just before he reached the avenue of pine trees leading to the Allerton house. When he drove beneath the high-plumed branches, and heard their far-away murmur, and the torrid glare of the road was left for a vista of cool purplish green, he drew a long breath. People generally drew long breaths of relief when they entered that pine avenue upon a hot day. Fields could see at the end the white Doric pillars of the house: a large Colonial edifice, all shining with fresh white paint. The house had been newly painted that spring. The lawyer thought uneasily that it might have been deferred for another year, had he anticipated those passed dividends, and then the summer plans of Miss Camille and Miss Susanne Allerton need not have been disturbed.

The wide veranda under the Doric pillars was clean swept and vacant. There were two heads at the two front windows on the left side of the front door. They nodded with dignified grace as he passed. He knew that there was another head at a side window, that of Miss Hélène Allerton, the youngest of the three sisters. He did not think uneasily of her as being affected by the passed dividends, because she had her own little private fortune in her own right, inherited from the aunt for whom she had been named. Miss Hélène had dealt with another lawyer with regard to that inheritance—a lawyer in a little city ten miles away. John H. had never known its exact extent nor how it was invested. There was in consequence a slight feeling of coldness on his part toward Miss Hélène.

When he had driven into the barn with its arched door, and the old man who with his wife were the only servants in attendance had tied his horse, and received instructions to give him sparingly of water when he was somewhat cooled, John took out his folded handkerchief again, gave a little flick at his smooth

face, another at his coat fronts, another at his knees, then passed around to the front door, and clanged decorously with the knocker. Neither Miss Susanne nor Miss Camille moved their heads again. Their white right hands flashed up as regularly as mowers mowing in line. The wife of the serving-man answered the knock. She was small and wizened, with an unmistakably Irish gleam in her blue eyes, and her fair skin was as freckled as a baby's. Her name was Bridget O'Haligan, and her husband's name was Pat O'Haligan. The ladies called her Brigitte, with a soft flop of accent upon the last syllable. Her husband's name, being hopeless, they had metamorphosed entirely. They called him Louis. There was in the Allerton family an affection so harmless and to the village people so unique that it compelled respect, even admiration. They affected—all the Allertons had done so for years, and the three sisters did likewise—a French pose toward the rest of humanity. The family tree framed in dull gold hung in the hall, and upon one of the stiff branches perched a long-dead collateral ancestor who bore a French name. Upon the strength of this one alien element, which distinguished them especially from all about, the Allertons had based their little affectation. The ladies all spoke French, it was said, with a remarkably pure accent. It was confidently repeated that the sisters could live in France and never be mistaken for Americans. Hélène was reported to have been many times in France, and nobody had ever found her out.

This harmless affectation had endured long in the Allerton family. Many branches of the tree bore French Christian names, uniformly accented upon the last syllable. The father of the three sisters had been Honoré. There had been another sister, Lucille, who had died when a very young girl. Her pretty name was near her father's upon a lower branch of the tree, and one could fancy her as a very small bird fluttering hence down to her little grave beneath another tree which wept every spring with long tears of gold-green.

When Fields entered the parlor, the long parlor with its six windows—the Allerton ladies had always wished to call

it the salon, but had never quite dared make such an innovation,—there was distinctly evident what seemed a slight foreign element. A steel-engraving of Napoleon was conspicuous upon the wall which caught the best light. There were also steel-engravings of Marie Antoinette and the Dauphin, and many of French nobodies in particular, characterized by high curled coiffures, sidewise wreaths of rosebuds, and looped flowered skirts. The faded paper was done in a pattern of flower-baskets tied together with knots of silver ribbon. The furniture was upholstered in dim satin of a First Empire pattern, and its shape was First Empire. The floor was a polished wood, with an old French carpet slipping about in the centre; there were Sèvres vases filled with roses on the tables and shelf, and candlesticks of French make stood on either side of the French clock.

There was about the Allerton ladies themselves, American born and bred as they were, something strangely foreign. They did not quite venture upon the high powdered pompadours of the ladies upon their walls, but their gray locks were marvellously puffed and piled above their high delicate temples, under which their black eyes flashed with youthful fire, although they were past youth, even the youngest of them. There was not much difference in their ages. As girls the Allerton sisters had been poetically likened by admirers to three roses upon one stem. They were unmistakably of the same family; all had the same high, thin cast of aristocratic face, with delicate nostrils, small, sweetly compressed mouths, and pointed chins. All had long slender hands with very pointed finger-tips. All had very pointed tips of tiny feet; all sat erect in tightly laced stays, with wide, carefully disposed skirts. All wore frills of lace around their throats, fastened with amethysts and pearls in old French settings. These jewels had come down to them from that long-dead French ancestor upon the family tree, who had scattered his gems upon posterity when he left the world, and strewn the dark of his passing with pearly and purple and golden gleams. There was a tradition that these old jewels had belonged to a French duchess whom the Allertons rather blushed to mention, al-

though they were secretly proud at the idea of possessing gems once worn by so doubtfully honored a dame. The youngest sister, Hélène, wore amethysts set in silver, and a broad gold bracelet with a wonderful coral cameo almost covered the turn of her slender wrist as she sewed. All three sisters embroidered industriously after they had formally greeted their family lawyer. People in Allertonville were always speculating concerning this embroidery. They wondered what it was, and if it was ever finished. Miss Susanne embroidered in white upon fine linen; Miss Camille, also in white upon fine linen; Miss Hélène, always in colored silks upon blue satin.

Miss Hélène had been unlike her sisters in one respect. They had been lovely and graceful, with an air of high breeding, but she had been a great beauty. She was in her own way a great beauty still. Her face retained its charming contour, its satin complexion, its expression of that indescribable sweetness which confirms beauty in its possessor. She wore a gown of ancient, faintly flowered silk. Her arms were round and fair, and her lace-trimmed sleeves fell away from them as she embroidered. A wonderful great pearl gleamed upon the third finger of her left hand.

That was the only ring which she ever wore, and with it was connected the romance of her life: the one romance, although she had been sought in marriage by many. She had loved and been betrothed to a young clergyman, who had been consumptive, and gone to the south of France to recover his health, and died. It was a very simple romance, but she had never had another, and she had worn her young lover's ring all these years. Her life had been apparently quite peaceful and contented. If the Allerton ladies ever rebelled at their lots, they accepted them with dignity. With all their pride in their French lineage, they evinced nothing of French emotionalism. They were staid and sedate under all vicissitudes; no mortal had ever seen one of them shed a tear since she was a child. They never laughed with abandon.

After John H. Fields had told the ladies about the passed dividends, Miss Camille took another careful stitch, and also Miss Susanne and Miss Hélène.

Fields was sitting in an old embroidered chair, his stick in his hand, leaning forward upon it. He had left his hat in the hall, but he had clung to his stick. His masculine nature required some slight material support, although, after all, he had known exactly how his clients would receive his news. There was not the slightest evidence of disturbance in one of them. Only, after a pause Miss Hélène remarked: "The directors are taking advantage of the panic, and are keeping the revenues for themselves this quarter. They will not dare to pass next quarter." Miss Hélène was the one of them who read the newspapers and drew her own deductions, sometimes caustic. This caustic estimate of outside proceedings was the only indication which she ever gave of her possible discontent with her own monotony of life. Fields hastened, although with much deference, to give her his own views. "They state that the passing of dividends is caused by necessary improvements," he said.

Miss Hélène nodded and set another stitch. "No doubt," said she, "necessary improvements in the country houses of the directors or the purchase of new motor-cars. Their expenses must be heavy. They will not pass dividends next quarter, sisters."

"It will not inconvenience us in the least," said Camille, with dignity.

"Not in the least," said Miss Susanne.

Then the maid servant entered, bearing a great silver tray laden with egg-shell cups and saucers, a silver basket with golden squares of sponge-cake, and a solid silver teapot, creamer, and sugar-bowl. Miss Hélène arose and seated herself at a little mahogany tea-table covered with a damask cloth, whose rose pattern gleamed like frosted silver, and poured tea.

When all were sipping tea and nibbling cake, the maid almost slyly removed the lid from a great Indian china rose-jar which stood under the mantel, and immediately it seemed as if there were another presence in the room: the multiple ghost, many-winged and many-songed, of old summers. This was the usual proceeding after the guest was served with tea. The little lawyer made no sign of noticing it, but he inhaled the strange spicy odor with content. If

he had let himself go, there was about him something of the sybarite, but he had never let himself go and never would.

The sisters discoursed of the weather and kindred topics, and did not mention the passed dividends until Fields arose. Then Miss Camille said, serenely,

"I suppose, of course, then, it is settled that we are not to expect our usual returns from that investment on the first of July?"

"I fear not," stammered the lawyer. "I am sorry, but, as you know, it is one of the old investments which your father before you, and my father before me, favored. I trust it will make no difference in your plans."

"Not at all," said Miss Hélène, in her sweet, slightly decisive voice. "Not at all. My sisters will go to Hopton Springs as usual during the first week of next month. I shall be entirely able to supply funds from my inheritance."

Miss Camille's face visibly brightened. Miss Susanne looked sharply at her sister, then she smiled. "Thank you, dear Hélène," said she.

The lawyer also looked relieved. "I am very glad," he said, and made his stiff adieux, got into his buggy, and drove away down the avenue. When by himself a smirk which his face had worn relaxed. He said to himself how foolish he had been to even dream that ladies like the Allerton sisters would receive unpleasant news unpleasantly. He had a great admiration for them; at the same time he was happy to get away from them. He had, as always when with them, experienced a strain as of standing upon his spiritual tiptoes.

But on their parts the Allerton sisters also relaxed. That pose, of so long standing that it was hardly a pose at all, but their natural attitude of self-restraint and dignity, vanished. Miss Camille looked at Susanne and Susanne looked at her; both faces wore expressions of anxiety. Then they looked at Hélène. She regarded them with her sweet, benevolent smile, which had in it a hint of whimsicality and disdain of the minor tribulations of life. Hélène's smile had always been of that character since she had lost her lover in her early youth. Everything after that had seemed very small to her. Therefore she was indif-

ferent in the face of all little worries, and she defied them, armed as she was with her knowledge of, and survival of, greater.

"Hélène," said Susanne.

"Hélène," said Camille.

"Well, sisters?" returned Hélène.

"It is not right for you to spare that money that we may go as usual to Hopton Springs," said Susanne.

"No, it is not," repeated Camille; but she flushed evidently as she spoke, and both Susanne and Hélène laughed softly.

"What will Major Bryant do if you are not there?" inquired Hélène.

"Yes," said Susanne, "what will he do?"

"There are plenty of other ladies at Hopton Springs," responded Camille, softly, but her flush deepened. "He will have no difficulty in finding a partner at bezique. I for one will never consent to take your money," said Camille.

"Nor I," said Susanne.

"I fear it will deprive you of your summer vacation," said Camille.

"Yes, I also fear that," said Susanne.

Both spoke with a slightly unpleasant emphasis. Hélène had always been as reticent with regard to her summer vacations as with regard to her inheritance. She always told her sisters upon their return from Hopton Springs that she also had been enjoying a very pleasant outing, but she never said where she had been, and both Camille and Susanne were too proud to inquire. They agreed that it was not as if Hélène were a young girl. "She is nearly as old as I am," Camille would remark.

"And there is only a very slight difference between your age and mine," Susanne would rejoin. "Hélène is of years of discretion; besides, she is an Allerton and a lady and our own sister. It is inconceivable that—"

"Yes, it is inconceivable," Camille would hasten to say, with severity. "I am surprised that you should—"

"I did not, Camille," Susanne would assure her. "Of course Hélène goes to some perfectly genteel place befitting a lady and an Allerton."

"Of course," said Camille.

However, although they always arrived at an apparently satisfied conclusion concerning Hélène's plans for the summer,

there was always an undercurrent of dissent and annoyance in the minds of the elder sisters. Hélène never seemed to be aware of it. She responded now as serenely as ever.

"It will not make the slightest change in my plans, I assure you, sisters," she said.

Both Camille and Susanne brightened visibly.

"Will you go away yourself as usual? Can you afford it?" asked Camille, eagerly.

"I certainly can," replied Hélène. She smiled, and her smile was at once whimsical, sweet, and patient. She folded her embroidery and arose. "It is time for me to superintend Brigitte about dinner," she said, and went out of the room, trailing her whispering flowered silk skirt.

When the door had closed softly after her—an Allerton sister had never in her life closed a door otherwise than softly,—Camille and Susanne looked at one another.

"Dear Hélène is very kind," said Susanne.

"Yes," responded Camille. Then she added thoughtfully, "If she had not been able to take her vacation at her own expense, if she had been obliged to share the money with us, then none of us could have gone all these years."

"Yes, that is true."

"We never could have gone to Hopton Springs at all," said Camille. She blushed, and her voice was full of wondering conviction. "Not at all," she repeated.

"We certainly could not if Hélène had asked to be considered in the vacation expenses. She must have received quite a large legacy from Aunt Hélène."

"Yes," assented Camille.

Then both sisters blushed. It seemed to them rather disgraceful to allude in such frank fashion to a legacy.

"Poor Aunt Hélène!" replied Susanne.

"She was a very beautiful woman," sighed Camille. "I remember her very well."

"Yes, so do I," said Susanne. "I am pleased that we shall be able to go to Hopton Springs, and I know you are, dear."

Camille blushed and nodded her delicate head.

"I have already begun to realize that sense of languor which comes over me here in the summer months," said Susanne.

"Yes, dear, you really do need the change," Camille returned, eagerly.

"I would not accept the money from Hélène if I were not sure that she is making no sacrifice, and would go herself, as usual," said Susanne.

"Neither would I."

Camille and Susanne regarded each other meditatively.

"It is singular where dear Hélène goes summers," said Camille, at length.

Susanne nodded. Camille had spoken in a whisper, and a silent nod seemed the most fitting response.

"Well, of course, wherever dear Hélène goes, it is eminently fitting," said Camille.

Susanne nodded.

"But of course it would be very gratifying to us, her older sisters—"

"We are very slightly older."

"Still we are slightly older—to know in the event of one of us being ill or—"

"The letters are always forwarded which we send here from Hopton Springs, and Hélène has promised that we should know immediately if she were ill or needed us."

"Still it is not satisfactory," said Camille. Then she added, and her whisper was like a thread of finely drawn silk, "I wonder—if Louis and Brigitte know?"

"We cannot question servants concerning our sister."

"Certainly not; only I wonder—"

Then a door was thrown open, and Brigitte stood there, and the fragrance of tea, hot biscuits, and fried chicken floated into the room.

The next day Camille and Susanne began the preparations for their outing. Hélène was unusually solicitous concerning them. She seemed especially interested in Camille's wardrobe. She sewed assiduously, laying aside her embroidery, making and altering festive garments for her sister. Hélène was very skilful with her needle.

One evening, about a week after the lawyer's visit, Hélène entered Susanne's room. Susanne was in bed, and looked up at her wonderingly. Hélène looked

very tall and fair in her dainty dressing-gown. She carried no candle, for the full moon gave enough light, and in that pale radiance she appeared quite young. She pulled a chair to Susanne's bedside, and began talking.

"Sister, dear," she said, "there is something which I wish to say to you. I do not wish Camille to hear, so I have chosen this time and place."

Susanne looked at her questioningly.

Hélène hesitated a moment. "I have been thinking," she said at last, "about—"

Susanne waited, staring at her.

"About Major Bryant," Hélène said, with a gasp. Her face flushed.

Susanne sat up in bed. "What about him?" she asked, in a trembling voice.

Then Hélène spoke out her mind. She had heard many allusions to this Major Bryant. She wished to know if Susanne thought that he had been really attentive to Camille.

"Hélène," said Susanne, fervently, and her voice trembled like a girl's, "I do believe that poor man has worshipped the very ground Camille has trodden on from the first."

"That was a long time ago, too," said Hélène.

"Yes, the Major has been at Hopton Springs a good many years now."

"And you think Camille has always known—that he made it plain?"

"I know he did, sister."

"And at that time, however she may feel now, Camille was justified in considering a proposal," said Hélène.

Susanne hesitated.

"Why did she not, if she liked him, and I begin to think she always has?"

"I think," replied Susanne, "that Camille remembered the sad ending to your romance, and she knew Major Bryant would have to come here. He lives in New York at a club, and of course Camille could not live in New York at a club; and besides, she would not wish to leave her home for any man. He would have been obliged to come here to live, and I rather think she feared lest he might disturb your—the peace of us all."

"That is perfect nonsense," said Hélène. Then she bent closely toward her sister and spoke earnestly. "I know, Susanne," said she, "that none

of us are young, but, after all, much happiness often comes from a marriage late in life—that is, if two really love one another. If this man, Major Bryant, is personable and is fond of Camille, and she of him, I wish that you would do all you are able to bring it to pass. I think, for many reasons, it would be well to have a man at the head here. I think I remember your saying that Major Bryant is an able man?"

"Oh, very able. I have no doubt."

"I do not feel quite satisfied with Lawyer Fields," said Hélène. "I think that he means entirely well, and serves us to the best of his ability, but I doubt his ability. None of us know much about business. I think a man at the head of this house would be very desirable."

"I think that Major Bryant is well-to-do himself."

"That of course has nothing whatever to do with it," said Hélène, with dignity. "There is enough here still with proper care."

"Of course," murmured Susanne, abashed.

"I wish," said Hélène, "that if this man is at Hopton Springs this summer, and seems as devoted as ever, you would delicately hint to Camille my views concerning the desirability of any plans which she may make, and I wish that you would do all in your power, without, of course, exceeding propriety, to bring about such an arrangement."

"Yes, I will, Hélène," stammered Susanne. Then Hélène went out, closing the door softly behind her, and Susanne lay awake, and wept a little. Camille's possible marriage seemed like a cataclysm. She was not in the least jealous, but a pain of curiosity assailed her. No romance had ever come to her. She wondered with a sense of injury what it was like. Romance in the family at this late date seemed to her like the advent of an uncanny spring in the midst of winter.

Next day she knew perfectly well what it meant when Hélène pressed upon Camille's acceptance a beautiful gown of embroidered muslin, which had been long among her treasures, and also one of lavender satin.

"Of course the satin is perfectly ap-

propriate," said Hélène, "and I understand that nowadays ladies much older than we are wear white. I know they dress a great deal at Hopton Springs, and this muslin with my pearl necklace will make a charming evening costume for you, Camille."

"But," faltered Camille, "will you not want to wear the muslin yourself, Hélène, and the pearls, and the lavender satin? Do not ladies dress so much where you go?"

Hélène laughed rather queerly. "Not much," she replied; "and in any case I have plenty besides. I have my gray satin and my black lace. Your black lace requires a little alteration, Camille, and I think some fresh violets are necessary in your lace bonnet. I saw very pretty violets at the milliner's in the village last week."

It followed that Camille went to Hopton Springs that summer with a really charming wardrobe, which she wore charmingly. Camille had been in her youth the least beautiful of the sisters, but her features had been more solid, and had resisted admirably the wear of time. She was a dream in her soft white embroidered muslin, with her slightly silvered hair piled high on her head, and surmounted by a wonderful shell comb; and Major Bryant was there to see.

Camille and Susanne remained at Hopton Springs through August and half of September. They did not know where Hélène was, and nobody else knew, unless it was the old servants, and they kept their own counsel. It was reported in the village that Hélène had gone to Europe. It had often been so reported before. Hélène had the reputation of a great traveller. Allertonville people believed that she alone of the sisters had in reality gone to France and spoken French. It was even whispered that she had been around the world. Sometimes even her sisters, with their utter ignorance of Hélène's resources, wondered if possibly she spent a summer abroad now and then. They wondered during this last summer.

"She may have run over to France," Camille said, now and then, to Susanne.

"Possibly," assented Susanne.

"She must have a considerable income from dear Aunt Hélène," said Camille.

"Of course she must, to have taken vacations all these years, and not been obliged to require her own share of the extra money from the estate," said Susanne, "and it is quite possible that she may have run over to France."

"Perhaps to the south of France, to see where *he* died," murmured Camille. She spoke sentimentally and blushed, and Susanne regarded her with admiring curiosity. It was a hot summer, and she reflected that it might be very uncomfortable in the south of France, but she also reflected that she herself knew nothing whatever about the leadings of love and loving memories which would enable one to gain a melancholy sweetness from discomfort.

When Camille and Susanne returned to Allertonville, Major Bryant came with them. Camille was as sweet as a girl when she entered her home and presented the stately, handsome man to her sister Hélène. It was understood that Hélène had returned from her mysterious trip the week before. Hélène made her sister's lover very welcome.

"We are to be married in October," Camille confided to her that night. Then she added, with a pitiful little cry as if pleading for happiness, "Oh, Hélène, do you think I am very silly?"

"You are not at all silly, dear," said Hélène. "You would be very silly indeed if you did not take all the good that life offers you. It would be like sulking to refuse because it came late."

"Don't you think he is a charming man?" whispered Camille. Camille's silvery hair curled when unloosened. It curled now all around her face, concealing whatever was shrunken in its contours. Her head, rising out of great frills of lace, looked lovely in the candle-light. She eyed like a child her slender left hand, upon the third finger of which a great pearl set in diamonds gleamed. Both sisters were in Camille's chamber, which was a pretty room, all frilled with a rose-patterned chintz.

Hélène laughed. "I think he is very charming, dear," she replied, in her slightly bantering tone. But suddenly Camille eyed her anxiously.

"Oh, Hélène, what is it?" she cried.

"What do you mean, dear?" asked Hélène, quietly.

"You are ill. You look bad. I have been so selfish over my own affairs; I have noticed it before. What is it, Hélène?"

"Nothing, dear, except that I am ill, I think."

"Is it—serious?"

"I think so. There, there, Camille dear, don't let your tardy joy be dimmed by this. These things have to come to us all."

"You are not—" sobbed Camille.

"Yes, dear, I think I am going to die before very long, but I hope I am not wicked to be happy about it. You, now you have a lover, dear, can understand how I have missed mine all these years."

"Oh, Hélène, what is it? Do you suffer?"

"Not at all. Do not worry, sweet."

"It is not—not near?"

"I dare say not; don't worry, Camille. Think how happy you are yourself."

"You may live for years?" gasped Camille.

"Yes, I may, dear. I may outlive you all. Nobody knows. What do the medical men know?"

"I suppose it is that old trouble about your heart?"

"Yes," replied Hélène, in a short-breathed voice. "Don't worry, dear. When I said I thought it would be soon I dare say I spoke at random. I only have thought that perhaps—it would be best for you to be prepared in case—But now you have this good man to take care of you and manage everything I shall be relieved of so much, and shall be so happy I may indeed live years."

"You have had too much care; I know you have," sobbed Camille.

"I was the only one of us all who could add a column straight," laughed Hélène. "I had to do what I could. Now your Major can keep the accounts. I shall lie back and rest."

"And it may be years."

"Yes, it may be years." Hélène's short-breathed voice had the sweetest of falling cadences. She bent over her sister and kissed her and whispered in her ear. "I am glad that joy on earth has come to one of us," she whispered, and went out, and Camille never saw her again alive.

The next morning Hélène did not appear, and she was found lying quietly in



her white-draped bed. She did not answer nor move when she was called, but lay in the greatest silence of all, with smiling, upturned face.

It was two months after the funeral, and after Camille's marriage to Major Bryant, that Hélène's journal was read. The last entry is quoted herein. Hélène wrote thus: "I have a confession to make. I may be thought even by those who love me best and hold me in best repute to have been guilty of untruth. I myself do not think that I have been, but it may be that I do not see clearly the right and wrong, being blinded by love. When I have stated, all these years, that I myself was upon a journey while my dear sisters were away, I have so considered, although I have never left this house in which I write, and the servants have known and have kept my secret. I have considered that I have never for one instant stayed my progress toward the great goal of all born of woman. You, Camille and Susanne, have as it were simply passed into another car of the train which bears us all forward past the scenes of earth to eternity. I have remained in my own place, and yet in one sense have I also not remained in my place. I myself went backward in the train when you went forward. Every solitary summer I returned to my sweet past. My old days of romance were my resort of rest for body and soul. I have made every day, while you were away, a day of my lost youth. By long dwelling upon that which

is gone I have been enabled to bring it to a semblance of life. As truly as I write this do I believe that this very summer, while you have been absent, I have spent whole days with my beloved and lived over old and exquisite experiences. I have dressed my hair for my lover, I have worn the gowns and ornaments he used to like, and, as God is my witness, I have seemed to see my own face of youth in my glass after many a happy day. I have travelled farther than most, for I have returned while yet in the flesh to the lost land of youth, and I have also gone forward, but of that I do not speak.

"And now I have still another confession to make. Aunt Hélène's legacy consisted only of the sum sufficient to pay your expenses this summer. She had spent all besides. In this too I deceived you because I loved you—for your happiness. I myself believe that deceit for the sake of love may be truth in the highest, but if it be not so, then I have to crave forgiveness from love."

The journal of Hélène Allerton closed with verses which were used as her epitaph, and were doubtless so designed to be used by herself, and they ran in this wise:

Here lies beneath this solemn stone  
One who has travelled far and wide  
With painful steps, but made no moan,  
Since Love was always by her side.

But now she hails the blessed night  
When she may lay her down to sleep  
Through sun or storm or fruit or blight,  
With Love her happy soul to keep.

